

# Testimony and Letters of Support

## House Bill 4552

Thursday, May 14, 2015



Good morning. My name is Jessica Fowle, and I am an associate director of admission at Kalamazoo College, as well as a member of the executive board of the Michigan Association for College Admission Counseling. I come to you today on behalf of our high school counselors, who are asking for help, so they can help Michigan students make better decisions about career and college choices.

The need for additional training is clear. College Board surveys of school counselors show two things. First, they tell us that over half of all school counselors polled tell us they think the graduate school training they received in career and college counseling was inadequate. Second, the College Board survey tells us school counselors in Michigan feel even less prepared than school counselors as a whole.

House Bill 4552 attempts to meet that need, while still respecting Michigan's current system of counselor training. This system consists of two parts: Pre-service training, which occurs in graduate school, and professional development, which occurs outside of graduate school, once counselors are on the job. This bill allows counselors to meet these new training standards in career and college counseling in either of these two parts.

Since this bill is not telling graduate schools they have to offer these courses, counselors who do receive this training in graduate school are already paying for it as part of their pre-service training—so there's no extra cost to them. Counselors who take it as part of their required ongoing professional development can already receive it at little or no additional cost, since groups like the Michigan College Access are offering training in this area for free, and there are commitments from MCAN and MACAC to increase the number of free courses in the next year.

It's been said that additional training in these areas isn't needed, since the current Michigan standards require counselor training in these areas. The results of the College Board surveys clearly show otherwise, since counselors feel that the current level of training isn't enough. Counselors feel more than ready to meet the social and emotional needs of their students, so more training isn't needed in that area—but they feel a strong need for more training in career and college counseling.

It's also important to realize that this lack of training has an impact on the work counselors do, regardless of their caseload or of the other duties they are assigned. Smaller caseloads certainly can improve counselor effectiveness, and MACAC is already working to reduce counselor caseloads and non-counseling duties. But counselors who have received comprehensive training in career and college counseling go back to their same jobs, and back to the same caseloads and duties they had before the training—but they are now able to make better use of the time they have with students, and create more effective counseling plans to make a difference in the lives of all of the students they serve. This is seen in the results of the exit surveys counselors conduct with their graduating seniors and the postsecondary choices they make—even when caseloads stay the same, better training in career and college counseling makes a vital difference in the lives of Michigan students.

Not every counselor feels the need for more training, but when half of the school counselors polled feel their training was less than satisfactory, it is clear something needs to be done to help our counselors and the families they serve, especially in rural and urban areas, where counselors report the greatest need for additional training. Too many Michigan families are spending their savings on career and

college plans that lead to no available jobs, high student debt, and a misunderstanding of all of the options available to students. Counselors play a key role in helping students make strong plans for life after high school—and stronger training leads to stronger plans. House Bill 4552 gives counselors the help they are asking for, with the flexibility they need to get that help in a way that's best for them. In the interest of Michigan's students, MACAC urges you to pass this needed change. Thank you.

# Executive Summary

In 2011, the National Survey of School Counselors revealed that school counseling as a profession was at a crossroads. As one of our nation's greatest resources, our school counselors could either become central to accelerating student academic achievement in our schools or remain at the margins of educational progress. In 2012, the frustrations and hopes of a nationally representative sample of school counselors and administrators reflect the central message of this report: although counselors and administrators believe in the college and career readiness mission for counselors, a lack of focus, training, accountability and resources for counselors stands in the way of real progress. Counselors are ready to lead in the college- and career-ready mission, but their graduate schools fail to train them for this mission, schools pull them away from this critical work, and their administrators do not hold them accountable for the activities that usher more students to college. In short, though counselors are poised to meaningfully contribute, they are operating with a broken compass. Encouragingly, students in schools where counselors are trained and held accountable for college-going activities are more likely to go to college. There is a growing national movement to better utilize school counselors and with changes in policy and practice, counselors can emerge as invaluable resources in our nation's schools to boost college and career readiness at a time of fiscal constraint.

## Survey Overview

### *1. Efficacy: Counselors and Administrators Agree on Counselors' Ability to Increase College and Career Readiness for Students*

In the 2011 National Survey of School Counselors, we found that school counselors, on average, have high expectations for themselves, their students, their schools and the education system; but reality in their schools falls far short of their hopes. The 2012 survey showed that counselor and administrator views were strikingly similar—on ideals and opportunities. More powerfully, they shared a belief in school counselors' ability to help boost student success. Faced with crowded classrooms, overwhelming caseloads, and dwindling budgets, counselors believe in their own efficacy—and their principals and vice principals agree.

- ✓ **Counselors believe in their own efficacy and identified specific areas where they could achieve the highest impact.** More than three-quarters of high school counselors agree on five items that they could effectively

improve, given administrative support and resources: the completion of a college-preparatory sequence of courses (82 percent); college application rates (83 percent); students gaining access to advanced classes and tests (81 percent); transcript audits of graduation readiness (78 percent); and high school graduation rates (77 percent).

- Counselors with a strong sense of self-efficacy are also more willing to be held accountable for improving measures related to college and career readiness. For example, among counselors who believe they can be effective at transcript audits of graduation readiness, 74 percent believe this is a fair measure of accountability. On the other hand, among counselors who do not believe they can be effective at transcript audits of graduation readiness, only 38 percent believe this is a fair measure of accountability.

- ✓ **Counselors and administrators have a shared vision of the mission of schools.** The mission "to ensure that all students, regardless of background, have equal access to a high-quality education" receives the highest ratings from school counselors and administrators, with 96 and 95 percent, respectively, rating it as an "8" or higher for how well it fits their ideal mission for the education system. Similarly, 92 percent of counselors and 93 percent of administrators reported that "ensuring that all students complete the 12th grade ready to succeed in college and careers" also fits a mutual ideal view of the education system.

- ✓ **Counselors and administrators agree that counselors are poised to take leadership roles in their school communities.** Nearly every administrator (98 percent) agreed with the statement, "It is important for school counselors to exercise leadership in advocating for students' access to rigorous academic preparation, as well as other college and career readiness counseling, even if others in the school don't see counselors in this leadership role."

- More than four in five counselors (81 percent) say that "being part of the school's leadership team" should be an extremely important focus of the counselor's job.

- ✓ **Administrators and counselors agree on a path to achieving school goals.** In the 2011 survey, nearly all counselors (93 percent) said they support a strategic

approach to promote college and career readiness (NOSCA's Eight Components), including 57 percent who strongly support this approach. In 2012, we have evidence that administrators agree: for each of the Eight Components, at least seven-in-10 school administrators, overall, rate themselves as an "8" or higher on a zero-to-10 scale for the extent to which they support school counselors in their school in incorporating each of the Eight Components as part of their counseling philosophy.

- More than two-thirds of school administrators support school counselors in incorporating the Eight Components as part of their counseling practice, including 79 percent of school administrators who rate their support as an "8" or higher for "advancing students' planning, preparation, participation, and performance in a rigorous academic program that connects to their college and career aspirations and goals."

- ✓ **Counselors in low-income schools are particularly well positioned to lead systemic efforts to promote their students' college affordability planning.** Comparing counselors at schools with low levels (25 percent or less) of students on free or reduced-price lunches to counselors with high levels (75 percent or more) reveals that counselors at schools with higher numbers of students on free or reduced-price lunches are far better trained, have more support, a greater commitment and greater accountability when it comes to college affordability planning and using student FAFSA completion data to monitor and review student aid reports. Counselors at these more challenged schools are also more likely, in general, to be committed and held accountable to the Eight Components and their specific activities.

Although counselors and administrators agree on the vision for their schools and the path to get there, counselors are struggling to implement the very strategies to which they have expressed commitment, and they do not perceive themselves as succeeding in the areas they identify as important. Students' college-going rates reflect this need to better target the work of counselors to support student success. The following sections outline three areas of opportunity and challenge to chart the course to college and career readiness: training, accountability and resources.

## ***2. Training: Counselors' Preservice and In-Service Training Is Not Aligned with Student Outcomes***

Counselors are among the most highly educated professionals in the education system, with three-quarters of counselors holding a master's degree (83 percent). Yet nearly three in 10 (28 percent) believe their training did not prepare them well for their job and more than half (56 percent) feel only somewhat well trained. The 2012 survey provides insights into the preservice (graduate school) and in-service (professional development) training, with implications for the different types of educators that prepare counselors for their work at varying stages of their careers. The survey demonstrates a powerful correlation between counselor preparation—both during graduate school and through ongoing professional development—and their students' outcomes. The survey also identifies key areas where additional training and professional development for counselors could accelerate college and career readiness for students.

- ✓ **There is a strong correlation between counselors' preparation and their students' outcomes.** Counselors who report being better trained are more likely to work in schools with higher rates of college attendance. While 27 percent of counselors who say they have sufficient training on at least five of the Eight Components work at schools with higher rates of college attendance, only 19 percent of counselors who report sufficient training on four or fewer of the components work at schools with higher rates of college attendance. When looking specifically at college readiness, counselors who feel better trained on how to provide high school students with the right college application materials are more likely to have students who go to college. Though counselors were not asked to specify if they received these specific elements of training during preservice or in-service training, the results indicate a need for improved professional development opportunities throughout counselors' careers.
- ✓ **Graduate schools are not preparing counselors to focus on college and career pathways once they work in schools.** The majority of school counselors with a graduate degree specializing in school counseling indicate that their graduate school did not adequately prepare them for the challenges they face on a daily basis. When looking at the Eight Components of a college- and career-

ready framework—which is endorsed by administrators and counselors alike—seven of the eight elements were “inadequately” covered in graduate school. Only one element, “Promote College and Career Assessments” was rated as extensively, or adequately, covered during graduate school by a majority of counselors (56 percent).

✓ **Preservice and in-service training inadequately prepares counselors for college and career counseling.**

Despite the fact that counselors and administrators endorse the Eight Components, for each component, at least 40 percent—and in many cases more than half—of school counselors say that they need some additional training or extensive further training. A slim majority of counselors felt they had “sufficient” training on only three measures: academic planning for college and career readiness (57 percent); college aspirations (56 percent); and the college and career admission process (51 percent); indicating a need for improved professional development opportunities throughout counselors’ careers, in addition to improvements in the graduate school curriculum.

- *College access is identified as the most needed area of additional training.* Less than half of counselors (43 percent) say that they have sufficient knowledge and training on “College Affordability Planning,” which includes ways to “provide information about college costs, financing, and the financial aid and scholarship processes so that students are able to plan for college and afford a college education.” Counselors in schools with lower rates of college attendance are especially likely to say that they need additional training. Compared to 66 percent of counselors at schools with higher rates of college attendance, for example, only half (50 percent) of counselors at schools with lower rates of college attendance say that they have sufficient knowledge and do not need further training in “Academic Planning for College and Career.”

### **3. Accountability: Counselors and Administrators Support Certain Measures of Accountability**

The 2012 survey provided additional insights into the state of accountability systems for school counselors, building on the 2011 finding that a majority of school counselors support accountability measures and incentives for counselors to

meet the 12th-grade college- and career-ready goal (61 percent of counselors support this measure), with stronger than average support among counselors in urban public schools (65 percent, with 32 percent who strongly support it), schools with high minority populations (75 percent, with 44 percent who strongly support it), and schools with lower-income students (70 percent, with 38 percent who strongly support it). In an era of data-driven decision making, counselors and administrators express support for certain measures of accountability. These areas of consensus align with counselors’ unique contributions in supporting the college and career success of their students. Despite limited examples of schools and districts that are using data and accountability to drive decision making, the majority of accountability measures remain uneven and under-implemented in the counseling field. In many places, the accountability measures for counselors are actually discouraging counselors from their work to promote college and career readiness.

✓ **Counselors and administrators support multiple measures of accountability that align with their views of the counselor’s mission and unique role.**

High school and college measures were both endorsed: transcripts of graduation readiness (71 percent of administrators and 60 percent of counselors rate this as a “6” or higher on a 10-point scale), high school graduation rates (61 percent of administrators and 52 percent of counselors) and college application rates (57 percent of both administrators and counselors).

- Middle school administrators rated two measures as fair and appropriate, one of which was also endorsed by counselors: middle school completion rates (62 percent of administrators and 46 percent of counselors) and promotion from grade to grade (59 percent of administrators and 38 percent of counselors). These are the same measures that middle school counselors rate highest.

✓ **Accountability is linked to better student outcomes.**

Among all counselors, those with no system of accountability work at schools with the lowest rates of students going on to college. There is also a correlation between certain types of accountability and higher college attendance rates, *even after controlling for other important factors such as student caseload, years of experience, and education level of the counselor.*

Dear Representative Roberts,

Thank you for sponsoring and supporting HB 4552. As a school counselor at Grosse Pointe South High School for the past nine years I can share that even though I had taught for 10 years and earned Masters level degrees in School Counseling and Teaching, when it came to college and career counseling it was like being dropped in the deep end! While I am fortunate to work in a community where 94% of the students will graduate and attend college immediately, this meant that the pressure for high quality, knowledgeable counseling is significant. I had to desperately seek out professional development in college counseling. When I think about my colleagues in schools where the college mindset is not providing similar pressure to learn college and career counseling I fear the results of the knowledge vacuum.

It is amazing that a part of my job that takes up easily more than half of my day-to-day time I was never trained to do! With the passage of HB 4552 School Counselors will get this necessary training and in turn better be able to support our students and our state to grow in higher education and skills training. I don't blame our school counselors for not having independently reached out for this professional development training in the past. School Counseling is an overwhelming job and with extraordinary caseloads and high needs populations, time is at a premium. However, given the need in the state, this should be a required knowledge base for all secondary school counselors.

If I can support the passage of HB 4552 in any way please do not hesitate to call on me.

Truly,

*Beth Walsh-Sahutske*  
**School Counselor**  
**Counseling Department Chair**  
*Grosse Pointe South High School*

Dear Mr. O'Connor,

I am writing to let you know how valuable this School Counselor Postsecondary Planning Training Course is. I wish I would have had this course a long time ago! The information is so very relevant to the work I do with students. I like that some of it can be taken and used immediately. Other topics require more thought, planning and conversation with teachers and administration...all good things, too! I sincerely feel that this course has made me a better counselor and my students are reaping the benefits. After all, they are why we do what we do.

You have been an outstanding facilitator. I am very fortunate to have had your guidance and thankful to you for sharing your expertise.

With appreciation,  
Lisa Reaume  
Monroe Schools

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May 14, 2015

To Whom It May Concern:

From September 2014 to the present I have been involved in a college level class entitled Postsecondary Education Planning and College Advising. This class explored the different aspect of getting our high school students into college. We looked at enrolling process with College Application Week and ways to get our High School into the college readiness. We explored ways to change the thinking of our school to college thinking. That every student could and should attend college, and that each student had the ability to succeed.

In January we explored the dreaded FAFSA. We looked at different ways to get our families involved in a FAFSA night. We learned the in's and out's of how to navigate this somewhat frightening process. As a parent with a senior myself, this came in very helpful as my family filled out the paper work.

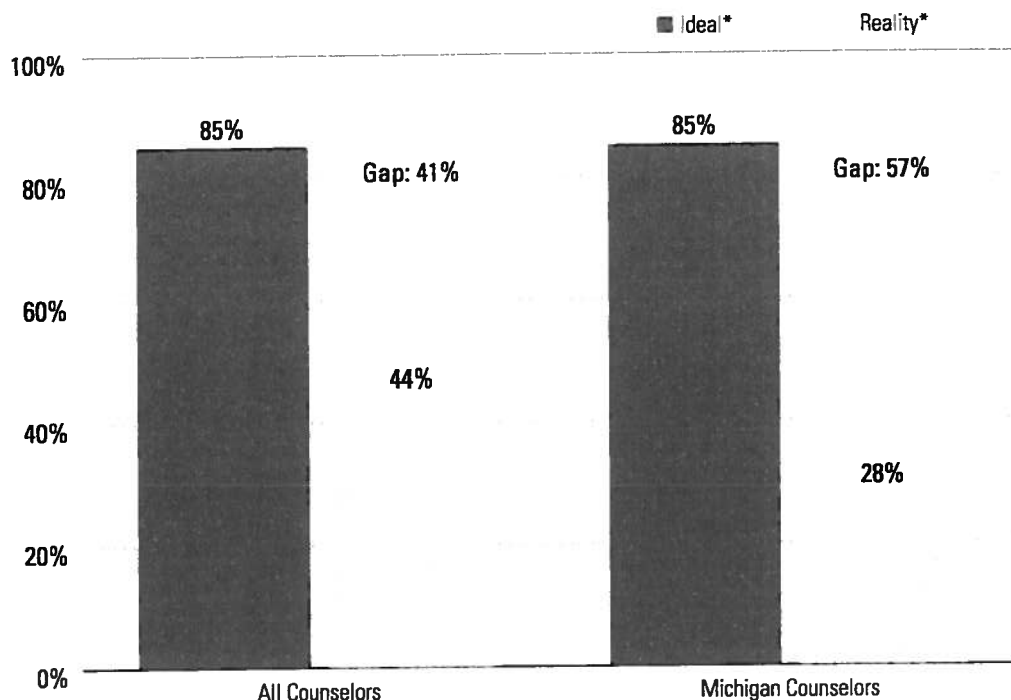
The last part of the course covered looking at the data that will help us identify getting all of our kids into college. Who needs the most guidance and how we not only need to educate our students, but also our parents for the college going experience.

I do believe that this is a very beneficial course for any counselor that is focused on the high school population. I have learned many helpful techniques to help my students move along to the next chapter of their lives.

Educationally yours,

Wendy M. Diefenthaler  
Columbia Central High School  
Guidance Counselor

**Figure 1: Counselors in Michigan See Greater Gaps in Addressing Student Problems So Students Stay in School Through Graduation**



\*Counselors rating "To address student problems so students stay in school through graduation" as a 9 or 10 for the School Counselor's Mission in the Ideal and in Reality in Their Schools.

### ***School Counselors in Michigan Desire Increased Training***

School counselors in Michigan report that their training inadequately prepared them for their jobs, that they desire increased training and that their training rates lag behind those of their counterparts nationally. This combination may indicate the need to refine preservice and in-service training requirements for school counselors. In Michigan, proposed amendments to certification and licensure of school counselors, which increase training requirements in targeted areas (R 390.1303-1306), may better serve counselors and their students. Nearly one-fourth of counselors in Michigan report that they do not feel their training adequately prepared them for their jobs (24 percent, versus 28 percent nationally, with a mean rating in Michigan of 6.8 on a 10-point scale, where 10 means the training perfectly prepared them for their jobs). Many counselors in Michigan have received supplemental training since beginning their careers but at lower rates than counselors overall. For example, 60 percent of counselors in Michigan, compared to 68 percent nationally, report receiving training on college and career readiness (see Figure 2). Only one-third of counselors in Michigan (33 percent, compared to 43 percent nationally) report having received training on closing the achievement gap. Overall, a majority of counselors report a desire to spend more time on professional development or in-service training (56 percent of counselors in Michigan and 54 percent of counselors nationwide).

